

Chronology of the Reintroduction and Management of Theodore Roosevelt National Park's Elk Population

This outline contains historical information from memorandums, letters, and other documents associated with Theodore Roosevelt NP's reintroduction and management of elk.

- 1843:** John James Audubon reflecting on a trip down the Little Missouri writes: *"We saw 3 elk swimming across it and the number of this fine species of deer that are about us now is almost inconceivable."*
- 1888:** Theodore Roosevelt writes about the decline of elk: *"This stately and splendid deer, the lordiest of its kind throughout the world, is now fast vanishing. In our own neighborhood it is already almost a thing of the past."*
- Late 1800s:** Elk extirpated from the Badlands. (Byran and Maser 1982).
- April 25, 1947:** Theodore Roosevelt National Park (THRO) established.
- Dec. 20, 1982:** Park officials at Wind Cave National Park (WICA) study the effects of elk and bison grazing and trampling on park vegetation. Elk reduction is considered an option to try and preserve the prairie plant communities at WICA.
- August 1983:** Park officials consider reintroducing elk into THRO in an effort to restore the historical Badlands ecosystem that Roosevelt and other visitors once wrote about.
- Aug. 16, 1983:** First formal meeting between park and ND Game and Fish Department on possibility of elk reintroduction.
- June 6, 1983:** THRO Superintendent Harvey Wickware submits the idea of elk reintroduction to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF).
- Aug. 22, 1983:** The elk reintroduction idea is introduced to the United States Forest Service (USFS).
- Dec. 7, 1983:** Superintendent met with Medora Grazing Association (MGA). MGA supported idea with concerns expressed.
- Oct. 11, 1983:** The three involved agencies THRO, USFS, and NDGF meet informally to discuss the Elk reintroduction. All three agree that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) should be written for this project to outline each agency's responsibilities.
- Jan. 6, 1984:** Letter to ND Game and Fish formally inviting them to join elk reintroduction process.
- March 5, 1984:** Acting Regional Director of the National Park Service (NPS) Rocky Mountain Region expresses his support for the elk reintroduction at THRO writing: *"Theodore Roosevelt already has a well-deserved reputation as a wildlife resource area. Your proposal to re-establish elk in the South Unit should add a major new segment to your resources management program."*

- Aug. 13, 1984:** THRO's Elk Management Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the elk reintroduction released for Public Comment.
- Aug. 22 - Sept. 17, 1984:** Letter from public and agencies both pro and con for project received. Medora Grazing Association (MGA) letter of 9/10/84 supported plan if compensation for damage by G&F and no significant damage to private lands by elk.
- Sept. 5, 1984:** Public Hearing on the EA is held in Medora, ND at MGA's monthly meeting.
- Sept. 10, 1984:** Chief Ranger met with MGA representative and Game and Fish Dept. to discuss compensation issue.
- Sept. 13, 1984:** Public Hearing on the EA is held at Dickinson State University in Dickinson, ND.
- Sept. 26, 1984:** ND Game and Fish Dept. responded with letter to MGA regarding the reference about compensation for damage.
- Oct. 31, 1984:** USFS Decision Notice signed by forest Supervisor.
- Dec. 21, 1984:** Plans confirmed by the Superintendent of WICA for a transfer of surplus elk to THRO.
- Jan. 8, 1985:** At WICA, elk are driven from Boland Ridge to the handling and trapping facility 3 ½ miles away where 87 are captured and park officials begin the testing/quarantine requirements for transport to ND begin.
- Jan. 9, 1985:** The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) statement was issued by THRO and approved by Regional Director.
- Jan. 21, 1985:** It is confirmed by the Rocky Mountain Regional Director of NPS, Lorraine Mintzmeyer that the elk reintroduction project will have no significant impact on the human environment. Press release on FONSI and plans for elk reintroduction.
- Jan. 28, 1985:** Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between G&F, USFS, and Park.
- March 13, 1985:** **47 elk (8 bulls, 39 cows) from the WICA surplus are released into South Unit of THRO at 3 PM. By 11 PM a large group of elk are seen gathered near Buck Hill. These elk were captured in WICA's January roundup.
- June 1985:** Montana State University begins a study in THRO of elk behavior, habitat use and food habits.
- Sept. 28, 1987:** Contact is established with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) by requesting information on elk for the park library.
- Oct. 7, 1987:** RMEF responds with a complementary subscription to Bugle magazine and information on how the park can ask for funding for other elk and resource management projects.
- Sept. 1988:** **Census 148.**
- Sept. 1989:** **Census 176.**

- October 1989:** Elk Movements, Habitat Use and Population Dynamics in TRNP by Jerry Wesfall of MSU completed. Stated census of 148 in 9/88 and 176 in 9/89.
- Sept. 24, 1990:** Regional letter to G&F stating reintroduction a success, noting depredation problems outside park and the development of a regional elk management plan by the G&F.
- Nov. 15, 1991:** The elk herd continues to grow and many leave the park to forage. Complaints from nearby residents of damage to property spark the question from North Dakota State Representative Kenneth Thompson, "Is the Park Service liable for these damages?"
- Dec. 30, 1991:** North Dakota Attorney General Nicholas Spaeth replies to Rep. Thompson stating that because the elk are outside the park they are under the proprietorship of the state yet still considered wild and the state is not liable for damage done by the elk. He supports this by offering a judgment from *Metier v. Cooper Transport Co., Inc.*, 378 N.W.2d 907 (Iowa 1985): *"To hold the state liable for all the conduct of its wild animals in every situation would pose intractable problems, and intolerable risks to the ultimate ability of the state to administer its trust. The heritage of wildlife beauty and splendor the state seeks to preserve for future generations might well be lost."*
- Liability for damages is averted...but elk reduction is considered.
- March 16, 1992:** ND Governor George Skinner proposes that THRO donate their surplus elk to replace the herd of Mitchell Charles which, at the time, was the only herd in ND quarantine for brucellosis contamination.
- August 1992:** Money for the water well and distribution system is approved at the National level for the new wildlife handling facility at THRO to be completed by 1993.
- Jan. 11 – May 13, 1993: First elk reduction in park with 90 day quarantine.**
- Jan. 11, 1993:** THRO begins roundup with intentions of transferring the animals to two zoos and Sully's Hill National Game Preserve in North Dakota and the Cheyenne River and Pine Ridge Reservations in South Dakota.
- Pre-roundup census estimated at 400 elk. Captured 278: 44 died, 176 shipped, and 51 returned to park. Cost of roundup ~ \$48,800. Post-roundup census estimated between 110 and 160 (130).
- Jan. 29, 1993:** **Returned 51 elk back to park** after testing negative for TB and brucellosis.
- Feb. 20, 1993:** A major effort is put forth to get the herd of Mitchell Charles replaced by THRO elk. Since the park had already stated they could not directly transfer the elk to Mr. Charles, the ND Board of Animal Health, ND Department of Agriculture, NDGF, ND Elk Growers, ND Stockmen's Association and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of ND devised a plan for a number of elk to be transferred to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. These elk could then be given to Mr. Charles in exchange for the meat from the herd that was infected.
- Feb. 24, 1993:** **Shipped elk** - 10 elk were shipped to the Dakota Zoo, 2 to the Chahinkapa Zoo, 3 to Sully's Hill Game Preserve and 8 to the Prairie State Park.

- May 5, 1993:** After the 90 day quarantine, 169 elk were left (44 having died during the whole roundup process). **Shipped elk** - 47 went to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, 51 were shipped to the Cheyenne River Reservation and 55 to the Pine Ridge Reservation.
- Oct. 10, 1993:** 'Forage Allocation Model for Four Ungulate Species' submitted by MSU (Westfall, Irby and Norland). Carrying Capacity set at approximately 360-400 elk depending on numbers of bison and horses.
- Oct. 28, 1993:** MOU renewed by 3 parties.
- March 11, 1997:** Helicopter **census estimated at 226 plus**, (42 bulls and 184 antlerless [cows and calves]).
- March 11, 1997:** MOU renewed by 3 parties.
- July 28, 1997:** G&F meeting with ranchers on the upcoming August elk Depredation Hunt.
- Aug. 15-31, 1997:** NDGF authorized the first hunting season for elk outside the park boundaries. One unit with a split season. The depredation hunt issued 36 sportsman permits and 17 landowner permits. 37 bulls were harvested.
- Feb. 11 & Mar. 12, 1998:** Two fixed-wing census, counted 160 and 120. No snow on ground for first flight. After a later snow, flew 2nd flight. Census in fixed wing did not appear to reflect true count.
- Feb. 18, 1998:** G&F meeting with ranchers concerning proposed 1998 depredation hunt.
- July 10, 1998:** RMEF approved park's request for funding a helicopter elk census in Winter 1999.
- August 1998:** NDG&F allowed another short season for elk hunting outside the park. 40 sportsman and 18 land-owner licenses were issued for this elk unit. 3 cows and 34 bulls harvested.
- Feb. 25, 1999:** Fixed wing survey completed. Counted 273 elk (24 bulls, 237 cows and 12 calves) with 270 in park and 3 bulls outside the park.
- March 1, 1999:** Helicopter survey completed. Counted 417 elk (74 bulls, 257 cows and 86 calves) with 410 in park and 7 bulls outside the park. ****Both surveys funded by RMEF, TRNP, G&F, and USFS. Total cost \$15,185.**
- August 1999:** NDG&F established 2 hunting units. There were 14 tags issued in E3 (2 landowner and 12 regular - all any elk). Season was from 8/13 - 8/29. Eight bulls harvested. For unit E4, there were 58 licenses issued (18 landowner and 40 sportsman). Early season was 8/13 - 8/19, and late was 8/20 - 8/29. Twenty bulls and 16 cows harvested.
- Jan. 18-28, 2000:** **Second elk reduction in park.** The 2000 Roundup lasted 11 days. Initial processing took 4 days (18th - 21st) to **process 297 elk** (1 small calf was not processed, if you see the number 298). TB checked 203 elk (21st-24th). On the 25th, 27th, and 28th **198 elk were shipped - 144 Kentucky, 8 Dakota Zoo, 3 Roosevelt Zoo, 3 Sully Hills, 40 Three Affiliated Tribes. A total of 94 were released back into the park (50 with radio collars). A total of 5 deaths occurred, of which 4 were attributed to injury.** One animal was identified as a "suspect" when given the enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) screening test. A positive test result in any non-domestic species could raise suspicions of Johne's disease (a mycobacterial infection), but should not be considered a firm diagnosis without considering

other indications (fecal culture status, clinical signs, etc.). False positives may occur due to infection with other mycobacteria (*Mycobacterium avium*) or other bacteria (e.g. *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis*). A necropsy and further tests showed the animal to be negative for Johne's disease. Roundup was a success. Cost of roundup was ~\$40,000. Post roundup census = 200 elk.

- August 2000:** Hunting units included E-3, E-4 (early), and E-4 (late). There were 2 landowner tags available in E-3 and 17 available in E-4 (landowners are not restricted to an early or late season). There were 12, 16, and 24 tags available for sportsman in E-3, E-4 (early) and E-4 (late), respectively. Harvest for E-4 landowners is combined for early and late season, 24 elk were harvested (14 bulls, 10 cows).
- August 2001:** There were 25 elk harvested (13 bulls and 12 cows) in unit E-4.
- 2001-2003:** NPS, RMEF and UND formed a partnership to finance and implement a 3-year monitoring study to track and monitor elk habitat and movement. USGS/BRD Northern Prairie was also approved to implement a companion study to research the population ecology of the park herd.
- July 2002:** Due to concerns about chronic wasting disease (CWD) a memo was issued by NPS Director restricting movement of cervids to or from NPS units without a 99% confidence that the prevalence of CWD was <1%. This memo effectively cancelled the upcoming roundup scheduled for January 2003.
- August 2002:** Elk hunt in hunting units E-4 and E-3 commences on 9 August. There were 50 sportsman and 15 landowner tags available in E-4. There were 9 bulls and 10 cows harvested in E-4.
- January 2003:** Roundup scheduled to remove ~250 elk from SU of THRO (reduce population to ~200) is cancelled.
- January 2003:** NPS and USGS initiate study with GPS collaring of 30 adult female elk.
- November 2003:** GPS collars deployed in January 2003 are remotely released and collars are retrieved. Location data from 29 adult female elk are recovered (~54,000 locations).
- August 2003:** Elk hunt in hunting units E-4 and E-3 to commence on 8 August. There were 50 sportsman and 15 landowner tags available in E-4. There were 12 bulls and 7 cows harvested in E-4.
- January 2004:** NPS/USGS capture and collar (GPS) second cohort of 41 adult female elk.